

Backyard Birds & Coffee No. 27

By
Clyde Wilson

Why in the world travel to Mecklenburg?

Why not! We have the best in Virginia to offer anyone who visits Mecklenburg, especially when it comes to birding. We have the Southern Virginia Wild Blueway, great lakes, great parks, the dam, rivers, the Tobacco Heritage Trail and a great bird guide.

Who believes this? I certainly do, and so does Donna. She traveled two hours from West Point to Mecklenburg to go birding and see why I say, "Mecklenburg is Heaven."

I had the privilege of introducing Donna to birding a couple of months ago before she moved to West Point to take on a new job. She admitted she had become a workaholic, and birding has given her an outside interest and helped bring her life into balance.

She bought the binoculars, the book and wants to retire here one day. Way to go Donna!

Buckle up, get your favorite beverage, relax and travel with Donna and I on this lovely morning as we set out on our birding tour.

We start out at Backyard Birds & Coffee, fueling up with a Vermont Maple Crunch Mocha Latte and away we go.

Immediately right off the bat we start our observation list with a Pileated Woodpecker and a Northern Mockingbird. As we head west on 903 we spot a really nice Red-tail Hawk sitting on the power line. We pull over and take some great pics, and we also see the Turkey.

Vultures cleaning up some road kill from the night before, yes deer. We add the Black Vultures and some Rock Pigeons. We cross over the Steel Bridge which is not there

anymore. How can you cross over a bridge that is not there anymore and make it across safely? Well you have to know the history of that bridge to understand, or email me if you really want to know.

We turn north on 711 and stop to digiscope a bird that is sitting in a tree top where an American Kestrel usually sits, but as I focus the scope, I discover it's a Northern Flicker. Another bird sings out. I say, "Hear that Donna? Listen, it's a Carolina Wren. And look flying up out of the grass, two Meadow Larks."

We spend several minutes videoing the flicker before we fold up the scope and continue on our drive. No sooner than I accelerate good, Donna spots something in the soybean field but hesitates before she speaks out. At first she thought it was just a stump but then shouts out, "Oh my, it's a large gray bird, and it has an owl like face!"

That got my attention. I hit the brakes of the bird mobile and say to Donna, "Tell me when to stop and I'll look for cars." This was extremely important as we're now traveling in reverse.

"There, right there, stop!" Donna shouts out with excitement.

That's what birders do (shout out) when they spot a new bird they have never seen before. Remember getting up on Christmas morning to see what Santa brought? Take that excitement and multiply it 10 times. That's the thrill of the hunt.

I pulled over to the side of the road, grabbed my camera and took several shots of this bird as he flies off out of sight. Unfortunately my shutter speed was set at 125 instead of 8,000. I did manage to get a picture, not printworthy, sorry, but good enough that we were able to ID this hawk as a Northern Harrier (an

uncommon transient and winter resident, Aug. 30 through April 30, according to Virginia's Birdlife checklist).

This was a new bird on our life list for both Donna and me.

"Good eye Donna," I said as we continued on our hunt.

At the dam we added to our list: Cormorants of course, one Common Loon, more Rock Pigeons, Blue Jays, Downy Woodpeckers, Chipping and Song Sparrows, an Eastern Phoebe, a Blue Heron, a Red-shouldered Hawk, several Bluebirds, a Belted Kingfisher and a Bald Eagle in a pear tree. (Hope you are reading to the tune of "Twelve Days of Christmas").

We ended our tour with a nice Italian lunch (a meat lovers pizza) and continued to bask in the excitement of seeing and discovering the Northern Harrier. Donna headed back north, and me, well I'm still excited that Donna chose Mecklenburg to unwind.

Ya'll come back now, and hope you enjoyed the trip.

Remember not to bird while driving and take time to enjoy beautiful Mecklenburg.



A red-tailed Hawk



Donna comes to Mecklenburg



What bird is this?

Birding notes & quizzes

Birding 101 — Monday thru Friday at Backyard Birds & Coffee from 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. Enjoy your favorite coffee latte, relax and enjoy the birds. No charge for this class.

You may view past articles of Backyard Birds & Coffee online at www.backyardbird-coffee.com as well as check out the upcoming dates for walks and tours.

Kerr Lake Bird Club meets monthly. Next meeting is Nov. 20, 2015. Social 6-7 p.m. Meeting 7-8 p.m. Like us on Facebook, Kerr Lake Bird Club. This month's topic, "One turkey you don't want for Thanksgiving!"

Kerr Lake Bird Club traveled to Sylvan Heights Bird Park on Nov. 8 to view the world's largest collection of waterfowl.

VSO Winter Field Trip, North Carolina Outer Banks, Feb. 5-7, 2016. Make plans to join trip leaders Bill Akers, Jerry Via, Lee Adams and Meredith Bell at the Outer Banks of North Carolina Feb. 5-7 for the VSO's winter field trip. We always have great waterfowl, shorebirds and raptors, along with a wide assortment of land birds. We're continuing to offer the Friday trip to Lake Mattamuskeet, led by VSO field trip co-chairs Lee Adams and Meredith Bell. See virginiabirds.net for more info.

Last week's quiz, "How many Starlings were in the FINGERPRINT?" No winners this week. But Bill, for your guess of 351, stop by and enjoy a latte on me. There were 4,000 (plus or minus) starlings in this fingerprint pic. How did I come up with that number you might ask? Good question. I printed out the picture, divided the picture into equal squares, counting the birds per square, and multiplied that by the number of squares (400 squares times 10 birds equals 4,000 Starlings).

This week's quiz, "What bird is this?"

Email your comments, questions, quiz answers and/or birding stories to joinclyde@gmail.com. Remember to take time to enjoy the birds and taste the coffee or our homemade lattes at our Bracey location, now open Monday-Saturday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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